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ABSTRACT

A commonly held bias in American society is that being an old woman is not a desirable state. One variety of this bias is stereotyping, which involves a restrictiveness of attitudes, so that old women are seen as possessing a limited and circumscribed set of qualities or characteristics. Restrictiveness also is associated with distortion and negative valences. The most detrimental aspect of bias is that the objects of that bias share the attitudes of the other members of their society, tending to stereotype, distort, and look down upon themselves. The findings from empirical studies examining the stereotype of old women as poor, dumb, and ugly have remained similar over the past 15 years. The majority of people below the poverty line are women over 65. Younger generations have more schooling than their mothers and grandmothers, even though women of all ages went back to school and jobs during the flood period of the late 1960s and 1970s. In addition, old women labeled attractive have to look youthful. In relation to men, old women lack power in society, except in the family. However, to negate the stereotype of the old woman, one has only to observe her diversity and to grasp the idea of relativity when defining old age. The older woman should be viewed from another perspective, one in which her life history records her transformations and individuality throughout her lifespan. (BL)

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POOR, DUMB, AND UGLY: THE OLDER WOMAN IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Old Women: "Poor, Dumb, and Ugly"*

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Introduction

I have been brooding about what to say in this talk for five months, ever since I accepted Nancy Datan's invitation to give it. One reason why I found it difficult to know how to proceed was the question of the perspective: Should I be generally gerontological or specifically psychological -- whatever that means? should I be objective or introspective? Should I stress commonality or variability? Another reason I was so stressed (or challenged) in thinking what I would say relates to two events in my own life this past year. First, the death of my mother has put me into the Omega generation -- to use Gunhild Hagestad's (1982) term. I am now the oldest generation, the oldest person in my lineage and must truly and appropriately come to terms with the label, "old woman." Second, I took my first real, extended vacation this summer, at least the first since I was 16 years old. As a student, housewife and mother, and professional psychologist, times off were snatched rather than planned. They consisted of days added on to professional trips rather than weeks with no thoughts about writing, teaching, or research -- or at least only occasional and essentially trivial thoughts. This summer, three weeks, in whole week-long stretches, were unadulterated recreation. I believe I was rehearsing for retirement. Like most women who have been studied (e.g., Atchley & Corbett, 1977) , I find the threat of my future retirement more immediate and ominous than other aspects of becoming an old woman. Thus, I have not only been assimilating the label "old woman," I have been filling out some of its conditions.

What I plan to discuss today, then, is the process of stereotyping and what the label "old woman" means; also the validity of these labels given old women. I also will look at the double comparison: Old women with old men and old women with young women. Other topics I plan to cover are the effect of expected life history or life plot line, and the cohort uniqueness of today's old women.

Stereotyping

Being an old woman is not generally considered a desirable state. The determined efforts of organizations like Gray Panthers

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and Old Women's League attest, in fact, to its stereotypical undesirability -- why else would these organizations feel it necessary to fight for change? Furthermore, like other objects of stereotypes, we old women tend to see ourselves as others see us. Declaring one's age if one is past 65, or even past 50, or, in fact, even past 30, is an act of courage and bravado, and can be considered newsworthy. Gloria Steinem's apparent glee at reaching 50 merited a flood of feature articles, and full-page photographs showing that she really did not look 50.

Several years ago, I noted that my first reaction on finding myself part of a discussion group that consisted exclusively of older women was that somehow I had been demoted; that my individuality had been removed, that I had become a cipher. Certainly, I was sure that whatever that group did would be boring. At one point this summer, on a train trip down the west coast, the dining car major domo seated me in a booth opposite two obvious "old ladies." Before I slid over to my seat, I looked longingly at the booth across the aisle which contained three young people, and wondered whether I would have the courage to ask him to seat me there. But I meekly submitted to fate. My two old ladies smiled at me with guarded politeness and every sign of supreme dullness. To make matters worse, a fourth old lady -- because of senior citizen discounts there were lots of us on the train -- was placed beside me.

Here, then, were the four of us close to glowering at each other in disappointment. Then we exchanged introductions -- and came alive! The guarded polite smiles gave way to genuine expressions, to real smiles. The original two old ladies turned out to be members of a Swedish choral group on the way to a national convention in Portland and the fourth lady was returning from a month on a primitive ranch and commune in Montana. Our discussion ranged widely from the history of national choral organizations, the state of agriculture and gardening, back-to-the land movements in the east and west, and revivals of antique clothing -- as satisfactory a conversation as one could hope for anywhere, particularly in a dining car. I remembered my previous experiences of eventually finding groups of old women as fascinating as other groups and, with a sigh of relief, concluded that old ladies are indeed people.

But why do I start each such experience with bias? Why do I, who have studied age bias and should know better, so often assume that old women are polite stuffed shirts who have little to intrigue me?

Perhaps one reason for my difficulty in removing bias was illustrated one week later, when I found myself the slowest member

of our 9-person family backpacking trip in the high Sierras. My children and grandchildren all slowed down politely when I struggled for breath in the rarified air and when my out-of-condition thigh muscles refused to perform on the mile-long upgrades. After we had camped, my 8-year old grandson's interest and solicitude did not help. "Your hands are so wrinkled, Grandma! How old are you? I wish I could see a picture of you when you were my Daddy's age so I could see what you looked like." To cap it all, he announced the next day, "I'll stay with you wherever you go in case you get into any trouble."

Life has its odd, unexpected compensations, however. The following day, when I had been left with the two youngest while the capable ones went off on an ambitious day hike, I took the 6-year and 8-year olds on a short trip into the snow. As California children, they couldn't get enough snow and had to be kept from eating it. Suddenly the two of them, like mountain goats, climbed up a sheer rock cliff and called to me from the top, "Come on, Grandma, here's more snow!" and disappeared. They didn't respond to my calls, obviously couldn't hear me. Just as obviously, they were in danger, I was sure, of getting lost. So, propelled by the super-energy of maternal nurturance, I actually climbed that cliff, approximately four times my own height. I shinnied up using hands and knees as I had never been able to do at any point in my life before. Inferiority turned to triumph!

Although Joshua's protective/patronising attitude had reinforced the effects of comments I had been getting all year from my younger academic colleagues, alluding to my upcoming retirement in ways that showed my growing irrelevance to the world of adults, my private triumph restored a sense of mastery.

As I've noted previously (e.g., Troll, 1982), there are several varieties of bias. One is stereotyping, involving a restrictiveness of attitudes about the subject. Thus, old women are seen as possessing a limited and circumscribed set of qualities or characteristics. We are poor, dumb, ugly, probably also irrelevant to the mainstream of life. Nobody notices that some of us may be wise, supportive, independent, even important. With restrictiveness generally goes distortion. One would see poverty, lack of intelligence, and unattractiveness in old women who might really be rich geniuses with enormous charm. Also associated are negative valences. One not only sees old women as poor, dumb, and ugly, but one feels hostile or contemptuous toward them -- like I did in my initial reaction on the train. The worst aspect of bias is that the objects of such bias share the attitudes of the other members of their society, and stereotype, distort, and look down upon themselves.

The epithet "poor, dumb, and ugly" came to me in a flash about ten years ago when I was asked to give a talk about older women at a feminist symposium. At that time, I evaluated the three components of the epithet against what might be called "reality." Were they true? First, poverty certainly was. While there were many rich old women, the majority of people below the poverty line were older women. Second, were they dumb? Well, that depends how you define smartness.

If we refer to years of schooling, it is true that over the past century in the Western world, each succeeding generation of women -- even more than of men, perhaps -- has had more years of schooling than its parents and grandparents. Among the three generations of women I have been studying over the past 15 years, for example, less than 5 percent of the members of the oldest generation -- the grandmothers -- had any college education. In fact, many had no more than a year or so of formal schooling. One-fourth of their daughters, though, had gone to college for at least a year, and one-half of their granddaughters had either gone to college, or, if they were still in their early teens, planned to do so. Since the way we traditionally assess smartness is highly correlated with years of schooling, it is no surprise that old women seem less smart than young women.

If you define smartness in terms of I.Q., intellectual changes during adulthood seems to be very different for men and women in our country. All test findings agree in this respect. Girls are more advanced than boys in the preschool years, although boys start edging up during the elementary school years, and boys score higher starting with high school. Longitudinal data show that men tend to increase in I.Q. during the years of early and middle adulthood, while women decline slightly. It is as if women used their intelligence to grow dumber, perhaps as an adaptive strategy to seem less competent than the men they seek to marry and do marry in a society that encourages men to "marry down" and to feel good about themselves if they are smarter than their wives. One longitudinal study showed that boys who had higher I.Q.s at 12 years of age gained more by the mid-20s than did those who started with lower I.Q.s, but girls who had higher I.Q.s at 12 gained less than those with lower I.Q.s (Kangas and Bradway, 1971). Data from longitudinal studies show that those women who are most "feminine" in a stereotypical fashion are more likely to decline in I.Q. during their adult years than the more productive, complex, self-doubting, and independent women. In fact, both the Terman and Berkeley studies, among others, suggest a release from dumbness in women who return to intellectual rather than nurturant activities in their middle years (Troll, 1982) .

In the later years of life, most longitudinal data on intellectual performance suggest stability in I.Q. until the

period of general bodily and functional deterioration preceding death. That is, distance from death is a better indicator of change in intelligence than is distance from birth. Unfortunately, most of these studies are of men. When Schaie and his associates (1973) administered the Primary Mental Abilities Test to three independent samples of adults of all ages, they found very stable and significant sex differences. Although women were superior in verbal meaning, reasoning, and word fluency; men were better in space, number, and general intellectual ability -- the overall score. This might suggest that the practice of looking dumber than men begin in adolescence is not altogether discarded in old age, or is for some reason revived. At least, women don't continue to get dumber in old age; they just stay where they have gotten to earlier. (But they are better with words than men their age.) I will return to this theme shortly when I refer to the double comparison.

We could also define smartness in terms of accomplishment. In my own research, I have tried to estimate age and generational differences in women's motivation to achieve, using a model of achievement motivation that incorporates a variety of modes, arenas, and approaches to achievement that are attuned to the lives of women. Briefly, the modes include achievement through task mastery -- doing whatever you do as well as you can, whether it be keeping your house clean or solving a chemistry problem; achievement via recognition or status; achievement via interpersonal influence; and achievement via creativity -- contributing something new to the world. I have also considered three arenas of achievement, home and community, traditional "feminine" jobs, and innovative, more traditionally "masculine" jobs. Finally, I have considered whether women try to achieve through their own efforts or accomplishments, or through the accomplishments of others, like their husband or sons.

In an analysis of the open-ended responses of 75 3-generation lineages of women (Troll & Schwartz, in press): grandmothers, their daughters, and their young-adult granddaughters, we found sex differences in both generational and age patterns of women and men. (We had also looked at the responses of 20 3-generation lineages of men.) While the scores of the men increased linearly from the grandfather to his grandson, those of the women showed a non-linear pattern. Each succeeding generation of men in the sample had a higher interest in achieving -- somehow or other -- than earlier generations. But it was the middle-generation of women -- the middle-aged, who were more motivated to achieve than either their mothers or their daughters. By chronological age instead of family generation, three-quarters of the teenage men wanted high achievement, but only one-third of the teenage women did. Women in their 20s were much more likely to want to achieve

than the teenagers: 4/5s of them as compared with one-third of the teenagers. Women in their 20s almost reached the level of the men in their twenties, which was 90%. And more women than men in their 30s and 40s wanted high achievement. Consistent with longitudinal data from the Terman and Berkeley studies, the 30s and 40s are the ages when the women who have earlier followed their "maternal imperative" -- or at least "feminine imperative" to adapt Gutmann's (1976) term of the "parental imperative", turn back to the other interests they have put aside for a while.

These data are intriguing because they fit neither the hypothesis of the "new woman" nor that of the "parental imperative." If we assume that today's women are blooming as a consequence of the women's revolution and new options for expression outside traditional feminine modes, why are the teenage women in my sample such duds? This is also true, incidentally, of high school and college students in other studies. And if women turn back to non-stereotypical behavior after their childbearing period, why are not the women in their 50s and 60s as desirous of achieving as those in their 20s and 30s?

Generational comparisons of approach -- whether you want to achieve through your own efforts or those of others, and in arena -- traditional versus innovative -- are clearer than those in ratings of level of achievement motivation. Grandparents are the most traditional in how they want to achieve and young-adult grandchildren the least traditional. And this is true for both men and women. Grandmothers are most likely to want to achieve in home and community activities, and if in any other arena, they want to do so through the accomplishments of their husband or sons. In parallel fashion, grandfathers want to achieve by making money, constructing roads and houses, or making and repairing automobiles, and they are mainly concerned with their own efforts. Their grandsons, though, are inclined to turn to less "masculine" or perhaps more "feminine" arenas like teaching and social work, or art, and they speak not only about their own work but also about the achievements of their wife or mother or daughter.

Let me read you some excerpts from the 1969 interviews of three women in one high-achievement-oriented family to illustrate this point. The grandmother, a 65-year old housewife from a rural background, said, "I like working out of doors, gardening, and getting the place in shape. I like to crochet rugs and I enjoy reading and doing crossword puzzles. I like to read to find out things. I read all kinds of things. Just see something or hear about something and want to find out about it. I like to do things that you can see what you've got done."

Her daughter, who was 40-years old then, a college graduate and a nurse, said, "When I was a child we enjoyed outdoor activities -- hiking, camping, picnicing. So I've always had an interest in natural science. At different times in my life it took different forms: as a child it was collecting things; when older, how they fit into different systems. And now it's more or less focused in the interest of protecting the environment."

Her 17-year old daughter, still a high-school student, said "I like to dance and sing...art work...something, anything unusual...just because it's different. I like to be around people, to talk a lot with people who want to relate to you and not those who sit back and say, "see this little mouse."

In spite of many family similarities among these three women -- a general finding through all the generational data -- there are generational differences in tune with the different eras in which they grew up and were living at the time of the interview -- in 1969. The grandmother, for instance, had never been employed outside her home, and apparently never wanted to be. But maybe if she were 65 in 1984 instead of in 1969, and thus in her 40s about the time the woman's movement started, she would have considered going back to school and/or seeking employment. Her daughter, in 1969, is not only a nurse, but a nurse-executive, devoted to her job life, as well as to her home. Again, if she were 40 today and therefore 25 in 1969, she might have looked for a higher-level job, one with a more stretchable ceiling than nursing offers -- or did at that time. Her interest in science might have guided her toward a research career, for instance. The granddaughter was tuned into the relationship theme of the youth generation of the 1960s, and besides, as a teenager, her mind was turned to other things, like forming one relationship. She may never take work as seriously as her mother does or household management as seriously as her grandmother does. But now, in 1984, at the age of 32, she might be considering a career in science too, expanding from her early preoccupations of marriage and childrearing.

It's too bad that the nature of the sample makes it impossible to follow her up -- the interviews were obtained by students in my life-span development classes and I had specifically instructed them to withhold names and other identifying information. The issue I have raised is that of cohort and period effects, of the influence of the era in which we are born and raised. I will comment on this some more later, but I might mention that in the one analysis we attempted on this point, our findings were disappointing. We divided the sample between those interviewed before 1975 and those interviewed after 1975, arguing that 1975 was the height of the Women's Movement and that at the very least we should find higher achievement desires after 1975 than before.

What can we conclude from these achievement motivation data about old women and their dumbness? On the one hand, more younger women than older had high achievement desires. But when we looked at those highly motivated grandmothers and their descendants, three-fourths of their daughers and grandaughters also had high-achievement motivation. They were not too incomparable with the 90% transmission rate of the highly motivated grandfathers.

Different Zeitgeists promote different expressions and different yearnings. The Women's Movement has had an effect, more on those women who are younger -- that is in their 20s, 30s, and 40s -- than on those who may have adapted irrevocably to the conditions prevailing when they were young. The young women of the 1970s had as a "generation theme" the attitude that employment outside the home is more rewarding than occupation in home and community affairs. And those who came from families that believed that high achievement is important for both men and women, were most likely to adopt the prevailing cohort theme. The transmission of values and personality characteristics interacting with historical spirits of the age is a fascinating subject that Vern Bengtson and I have discussed more thoroughly than I can here (Troll and Bengtson, 1979, 1982).

Aside from transmission, though, there is the issue of arrogance. For a number of reasons, women who adopted dual careers, or the realm of employment over the realm of home, tend to feel that they are superior to those who didn't -- and for "superior" read "smarter". To misuse Carol Gilligan's title, they believe the "different voice" is a more valuable voice, and this fuels age/sex bias, adding to the "generational stake" I will describe soon. In a recently published chapter by Diane Alington and me (Alington and Troll, 1984), the point is made that "In our hunger for progress, we tend to encourage media-propagated myths that shroud the reality of women's lives and discourage efforts to improve that reality....the facts do not provide support for the belief that women have played a causal role as agents of change....recent changes are rooted in the economic needs of the nation, not in the sociopolitical needs of its women. The winds of change have swept through women's worlds before, opening the doors of opportunity in response to economic conditions, only to close them again when conditions change."

To assume that the "new woman" has sprung from the head of Zeus and is, therefore, more godly denies the vulnerability and tenuousness of women's opportunities in the career world. To assume that old women who were not "new women" are inferior or dumber is to make a dangerous error. I return to my question about why I react with bias to other old women. I was one of those "new women" of the short-lived breed of World War II, and

like more recent "new women" felt superior to my contemporaries who remained focused on their homes. I am continually caught by surprise that they too can be interesting vital people. And I have particular trouble facing the need to redefine myself in the light of my coming retirement, as did, incidentally, my mother who came from the brief cohort of "new women" of the post-World War I era. Perhaps if we so-called "new women" would be less snooty about our opportunities, we would be more tolerant of non-new women.

It is clearly tricky to draw firm conclusions about how dumb or how smart old women as a class really are. Those women with lots of schooling who were able to enter occupations and live lives of cognitive complexity are now coming of age -- I mean becoming old, and maybe they are going to change, for a while, anyway, some of our present conclusions about the smartness of old ladies. In fact, based upon the resurgence of anti-intellectualism and apathy among present-day college students as well as the prospect of decreasing options for achievement for women altogether, we may find that the old ladies of the near future are smarter than their daughters and granddaughters.

Now for the third term in the epithet: are old women ugly? A dozen years ago, before there were any data, I had no question that this was true, that is, I believed to be true. Few people then would have rated older women as attractive and few old women would be rated as attractive. This view was, of course, shared by old women themselves. A few years later, one of my then graduate students at Wayne State University, Carol Nowak (1976) provided some systematic data that supported this hunch. Older men, she found, are often considered attractive, particularly by young women, but older women are not, particularly not by younger men, "Harold and Maud" to the contrary. The reverse-sex May-December marriage is still a curiosity, reserved for unusual people, and not a common occurrence, although two days ago I noticed two ads in the Personal section of Psychology Today for a service providing cross-age combinations -- a service that cleverly called itself "Anachron."

Re-evaluation

What I have just described was the labeling of old women in the early 1970s. This spring, in 1984, I was again asked to talk about "the old woman". Curiously, adding the present talk to the spring one suggests that this is the year of the old women, or at least the year that it has been decided to talk about old women. In my talk this spring, I used the occasion to evaluate my earlier epithet. If old women were to be labeled poor, dumb, and ugly in the early 1970s, were they still to be considered poor, dumb, and

ugly in the 1980s? Well, it does not seem to me in 1984 that I can see any enormous change in this respect. The majority of people below the poverty line are still women over 65. Younger generations still have more schooling than their mothers and grandmothers, even though women of all ages went back to school and jobs during the flood period of the late 1960s and 1970s. And, in spite of Glamorama ads, old women labeled attractive have to look youthful.

Is this something to do with what Bengtson and Kuypers (1971) so aptly termed the "generational stake?" In their review of data on actual versus perceived generational differences in attitudes and values (the "generation gap"), they found that each generation assumed that the other generations were either more conservative, if they were older than they, or more radical, if they were younger. They concluded that younger generations have a need to exaggerate the differences between themselves and their parents and grandparents in order to stress their uniqueness and separateness from previous generations. This seems to be particularly true in young adulthood, in the process of identity formation. At the same time, older generations seem to need to exaggerate the similarities between themselves and their children and grandchildren, perhaps to assert their wish for carrying on of the torches they have held during their lives. If they have dedicated years of their lives to affirming and supporting their values and beliefs, they do not wish these efforts to have been in vain.

Do young women, in this respect, want to see their mothers and grandmothers as poor, dumb, and ugly so that they can see themselves better as rich, smart, and beautiful? Do I, as an old woman, exaggerate my own wealth, intelligence, and attractiveness so that I can see the same qualities in my daughters and granddaughter? While I might like to pursue this fancy, I remind myself that few old women really believe they are rich, smart, and beautiful. In fact, it is reasonable to presume that if I do exaggerate my own positive attributes I want to maintain an equality with my daughters and grandaughters, rather than try for superiority. Let me quote from an interview selected at random from my file: that of an 81-year old woman: "It's bad for me to say but for a person my age I don't like older people. I like to be around younger people more. I hate old-fashioned things; I like to be up-to-date. Older people should listen to younger people to learn." Here is a variation on this theme, from a 63-year old woman. "I like to have time to read. I try to choose literature that is upbuilding and historical. Today, older people, ah, are confused as to some talents and, ah you have very little in common, on, ah, subjects of politics, religion and amusements. This makes for dull cooperation; this makes for

strange feelings. I, ah, want to keep the middle ground and believe the youth will be our young America and give, ah, them a chance."

It is interesting to note, though, that while many of the old women in the sample commented on how dumb old people are, few commented on either poverty or appearance. It is true that many said their major change over the years was getting fat, but they seemed to take this for granted, as they did their relative poverty.

Power and the double comparison

Neither poor, nor dumb, nor ugly deals with the issue of power or what I referred to earlier as irrelevance, and it seems to me wrong to omit any reference to this issue from a dis ussion of the psychology of older women. It does not do to talk about power of old women without comparing their power or relevance with that of young women on the one hand and with that of older men on the other hand. In fact, both these comparisons should be made simultaneously. Bernice Neugarten (1968) stated this point almost two decades ago: that sex differences have to include age differences, and vice-versa, that we need to think of age/sex categories.

The point of the double comparison was made, I think, most poignantly by Jacqueline Goodchilds (1977). In a discussion of women and power, she noted that women psychologists of our older generation were socialized to assume that they would always be second to men psychologists, that if they stumbled into a room full of men at an APA meeting, for example, they should beat a hasty retreat because it would undoubtedly be a high-level meeting in which women would not belong. Serious and vital issues of APA policy were not the purview of women psychologists then. It is true that today's APA governing bodies do include women, as do many other higher level policy groups, but how often are these women as old as the men in the groups? Whatever the reasons -- socialized expectations, preferences for style, or simple considerations of whom it is pleasant to work with, Goodchild's final words may be as applicable today as they were a decade ago: "Ah, but do you see it? The old men and the young women together as our ruling elite. It has a familiar stereotypical ring about it."

Beliefs about women and power have fluctuated dramatically over the past few years. But one general tenet is constant. If there are changes in power relative to men, it is young women that are experiencing these changes. This view opposes the

ethnographically derived view that old women -- generally defined as post-menopausal women -- gain power over what they had before. This ethnographic view, however, opposes old women to young women. It is rarely claimed that the power older women may gain is an ascendance over men.

Only in one respect can that be claimed -- within the family in the modern world. Since women now can expect to live almost eight years longer than men, since women generally are married to men several years older than they, and since health is related to distance from death, many old women are in better health and have more vigor than the men to whom they are married. There is some kind of power that accrues to a healthy person taking care of a less healthy one, to a vigorous person yoked to a less vigorous one. As Barbara Turner and I noted in an earlier paper, though (Troll and Turner, 1980), this kind of power often brings with it virtual imprisonment in the home, not to mention anxiety and drudgery, and is not the kind of power in the larger world we were talking about earlier.

Sexual activity is a tangential illustration of these points. Almost all data show that the frequency of old women's sexual activity is contingent upon the presence of a man and decreases as a function of her partner's activity. Far fewer older women who lack a partner look elsewhere for sex than do men in the same position.

One of the places I went this summer was to Banff, to fulfill a dream I had since I was 8 years old, when my father showed me a postcard of Lake Louise looking remote and incredibly beautiful. He had never taken me there on his trips through the Canadian West, and I had never found the occasion to do so since. Great disappointment! Lake Louise and Banff both turned out to be over-touristed, shoddy, and uninspiring, at least against the expectations of my dreams. But I did observe with fascination the phenomena of tour-bus composition and behavior. The day trip I had signed up for consisted largely of older couples who were excessively polite, like the women on the train. The women were even more subdued than their husbands, and I and one young German woman seemed to be the only people on our bus who hiked the trails and did anything but stay near the bus and take pictures of each other. At one stopping place, however, our bus parked near another tour that seemed to consist mostly of older women, no couples. These women were loud and boisterous, full of chatter and laughter. Their dress was colorful and they were vivid jewelry. They reminded me of the "merry widows" described by Helena Lopata (1973), those women who were widowed late in life, as opposed to those widowed early. It occurred to me that widowed and divorced older women have, in a way, more effective power than

those who are still married. They at least can make decisions for and about themselves -- unless, of course, their children take over.

Like most others who have taught courses in aging, I have been told by many of the students that they want to learn about aging so they can help their parents. Ofter these parents are in their early 40s! Along with the scorn of daughters who see their mothers as poor, dumb, and ugly goes the conviction that they, the daughters, must do something about taking care of their mothers, who won't know how to take care of themselves. Remember my grandson, who at 8 is all primed to take over supervising of me. It is not too surprising that Glenn and McLanahan (1981) found no difference in happiness between those women over 50 who were mothers and those who had no children.

While I am on the subject of family power, I will add the power embodied in the grandparental or even parental role. In both these roles, older women generally prefer to keep out of direct power transactions. The term I coined last year, "Grandparents: the family watchdogs" (Troll, 1983) seems to me to imply that active intervention and influence over younger generations results from deficit rather than gain situations. Grandparents step in when there is trouble or need in the family. Otherwise, they would rather go on about their own affairs or at least are happier when they are able to do so. They, therefore, would not find a lot of grandparental activities rewarding, except in the sense of correcting deficits -- helping their family continue to carry the torch instead of dropping it by the wayside.

We should not omit reference to the issue of affiliation, friendships, and network supports, in which women may compensate for power deficits. As we all know, women are generally more sociable and person-oriented than men. We tend to enjoy family relationships more, our friendships are more self-disclosing and confiding, and when we lose friends through moving away, death, or other separations, we tend to replace them more often than men do. Kathleen McCormick (1983), who completed a dissertation with me on best friends versus just friends, found that some of her older men respondents could not give her the address of their designated best friend because, they said, they did not know where he was now. None of the older women had lost touch with her best friend. Many men, in this and other research on friendship, list their wife as their best friend; no woman lists her husband. Essentially, there are many trade-offs in sex differences in later life. For example, women live longer than men, but men have more money. Women are healthier, but men can remarry. Women have friends to keep them from being lonely, but men can remarry.

Diversity

The opposite of stereotyping is recognizing diversity. The uniform polite smiles of the old ladies in the dining car became non-stereotypical when they dissolved into varieties of expressions. To illustrate this kind of diversity, let me quote some more from my 3-generation files, responses to questions like "What are some of the kinds of things you like to do (or not do)? "What kinds of people do you admire (or not)? If money were no object, where and how would you like to live? Again, these excerpts have been pulled randomly out of the file drawers.

A 67-year old woman: "I like to create things: sew, crochet. And I like cooking and housework. I don't like snobs, that's for sure. I admire my children and grandchildren and I have very good neighbors. If money were no object, I'd live right where I am. Right in my own home where I've been for the last 28 years.

A 76-year old woman: "Well, I like to go to dances and for passing the time away I like to putter in the backyard to plant a garden with flowers. I like company, I like to play cards and spend my time that way. I like people that are not too forward, I would say courteous and those who talk about different things in life, and a good disposition. Well, I think I would probably like to live in Michigan, where I could leave it anytime I wanted to, to go to live in the warmer climate. I'd like to do some traveling too."

A 74-year old woman: "What do I like to do? Nothing since I retired. I'm just retired, that's it. I don't take any part in things that are going on today. I like good law-abiding citizens. Don't get into any trouble with the law. They are right and that is the way it should be. The law is good. If money were no object, I would like to do a lot of traveling and I wouldn't ride in anything but a plane. I would like to see the whole world, yes, including Poland, Red China, and Africa. I would like to see how everybody, <u>everybody</u> lives. I have heard so much about it, and I have read and looked at so many pictures. I want to see if it is really like that. Those poor little starving kids. If money were no object, I would get right off the plane and help them"

An 80-year old women: "I like to play bingo, watch T.V., cook and visit churches and funeral homes because I meet friends and make new ones. I admire priests and nuns because of their dedication and education, and religiousness. I would stay here and move to Grosse Point in a large house that was close to a church."

A 76-year old woman: "I like art decorating within my home. I love gardening; like the outdoors. I enjoy being a housewife, sewing, cooking. Can't stand phoneys. If my children weren't around, I'd like to live in LA. near Newport Beach in a Mediterranean style architecture, moderate sized home."

An 85-year old woman: "I like nursing, working contagion. It was interesting to see people get better, like typhoids. You could watch them get better. Now, I like watching the news. I'd like a nice apartment in New York City."

A 74-year old woman: "Well, I love to embroider and crochet and keep myself busy as much as I can, try to help anybody that's in need, go to church steady, and what more would you want in life? I admire honest people...people that are good...and I don't know, I don't know what else to tell you. I couldn't live any different than I live. I tried Florida for a year and a half and never liked it. I love where I was born and raised. My house is just right for me. I'm a very satisfied person."

Finally, a 91-year old Black woman: I'm too old to do much of anything. Times was when I used to get up and not see a chair till bedtime. Now I can just set and look out the window and read all day. You know I ain't the woman I used to be. I thought a mighty lot of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King. They done a lot for the poor Negro and they was killed for it. You know, there's so many mean, low-down people in this world who don't want the poor colored people to get good jobs and good education. But God sees them and they gonna pay for it Judgment Day. I'd like to go back to the South to visit some of my folks for a while if my health could stand it, but I'd like to live right here with my daughter."

If I had more time,I could expand the range of interests, attitudes, aspirations, and degrees of complexity even further, but I hope I have given you the flavor of the many ways there are to be an old woman. "

When is "old?"

What I haven't mentioned so far is what age is old. For many researchers, particularly those geared to demography or social policy, 65 is the dividing line. Biologically oriented people divide earlier, at the menopause, which means about the age of 50. When we put together our book called Looking Ahead (Troll, Israel, and Israel, 1977), our editor at Prentice-Hall said we should target it to women over 30, an age she was approaching and dreading. Like most life-span terms, "old" depends on what you are talking about. I became a mother for the first time at 30, and felt equivalent in age to women of 18 or 20 in most aspects of my life. I went back to work at 40, and felt equivalent to women

in their 20s who were also in the early stages of their careers. I finished my Ph.D. and entered Academia at 50, and felt equivalent to women in their late 20s and 30s. Perhaps this is why having to redefine myself as an old woman comes more unexpectedly than if I had a series of transitions in age appropriateness along the way. As most research shows, age appropriateness, or its opposite, age deviance differs by age, sex, ethnicity, and national origin, among other things. I leave it to you today to use whatever definition of old age you wish. I think most of what I have said will fit a wide range of chronological ages.

Expected life history

Ray Bortner (1978/9), the year before he died of the heart attack he had expected, suggested that most of us have an "expected life history" that covers the events we expect to happen to us in the future as well as the approximate time these events will occur. Marshall (1975), among others, has shown that many of these markers derive from the lives of our parents. Bortner, for example, expected to die of a heart attack in his 40s because his father and other male predecessors had. The same concept is suggested by Brooks-Gunn and Kirsch (1984). They use the term, "plot line," and say that one of the problems faced by old women today is that their plot lines end at middle age, or that it is completely predicated upon marriage and parenting. Today's cohort of old women, whose parenting ends before midlife and sometimes whose marriage does too, are thus likely to be left stranded for the future. We need models of old women who show us how to be old. In the last few years, as more and more women lived out their predestined life spans, such models have become available, but because these models themselves have been pioneers in longevity, their experiences and feelings may show us more what we don't want to do than what we want to do.

Summary

With some digressions into empirical research and my own life experiences, I have talked today about the stereotype of old women. I have inferred two general consequences of these stereotypes of poor, dumb, ugly, and irrelevant. One is polite blankness. The other is the opposite, which I have not talked about, and which I think of as anti-stereotyping. The flamboyant, women on that "other" bus in Banff are examples of this, as is the cult heroine in the movie, 'Maud'. Maybe there is another way, one of creative achievement that continues from earlier life even though it goes through transformations to suit or adapt to altered conditions of vitality, opportunity, and interest, a way which allows us to flourish in our own individuality without being either masked or flamboyant.

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